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SIPDIS

STATE FOR P, EUR, EUR/SE, NEA AND NEA/NGA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: KIRKUK VIOLENCE HAVING IMPACT ON TURKISH
PUBLIC OPINION, PUTTING GOT UNDER PRESSURE

(U) Classified by DCM Robert S. Deutsch. Reasons: 1.5 (B
and D).

Summary and Comment

11. (C) The August 23-24 violence in Kirkuk that left several Turkmen and Kurds dead/injured was front page news in Turkey over the weekend, and generated demonstrations in front of the Ankara PUK offices that reportedly left 23 police and 5 demonstrators injured. While the story has subsided here to an extent, it has had strong impact on Turkish public opinion and put GOT officials under pressure. While the GOT is making an effort to turn Turkey's Iraq policy into one that looks at the country as a whole (and in this case did make a helpful statement to the effect that the US and Turkey were cooperating, and the situation was under control), the press and public continue to focus squarely and almost exclusively on the issues of the north, and in particular the tensions between Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) and the KDP and PUK Kurds. Clashes between these groups in northern Iraq will contribute to the difficulty the GOT will face in getting public and parliamentary support for a Turkish contribution to the Iraq stabilization force elsewhere in Iraq. End summary and comment.

12. (S) Based on what we have been able to learn from CJTF-7 and CPA-North, on August 22 in Tuz Khurmatu, Shia Turkmen demonstrated in protest of the desecration of a Shia shrine, and shooting broke out between the Turkmen and Kurds, resulting in the deaths of two Kurds and three Turkmen. Coalition forces responded to the firefight, were fired upon themselves, and returned fire. Two more Turkmen were killed, although it is not clear from various reports whether they were hit by US forces or others. On August 23, a Turkmen demonstration was held at a police station in Kirkuk to protest the composition of the Kirkuk police force. A protester tried to place an ITF flag on the building. Several shots were fired from inside and a grenade was thrown from outside. The crowd was then dispersed by coalition forces and local police. This crowd then linked up with another demonstration at the Kirkuk Government building to protest the shooting of Turkmen in Tuz Kurmatu. When the two groups joined together, totalling over 800 people carrying Iraqi Turkmen Front and Shia Turkmen flags, the crowd became excited and local police apparently fired shots into the crowd, killing two Turkmen and wounding two others. The police suspected of firing the shots have been arrested and are in jail. Coalition forces and the Kirkuk City Council are looking into the incident and meeting with local community and political leaders to defuse the tensions.

13. (S) According to a US military officer who was on the scene in Tuz Khurmatu, both sides had weapons and neither could say who started the shooting, but the coalition intervention ended it. Religious and party leaders from both sides went on local TV to denounce the violence. The situation on the ground seems to be on the mend. However, the Turkish press over the weekend would lead to the opposite conclusion, with some reports suggesting that the tensions were intentionally stoked by KDP and PUK leaders to avert the deployment of Turkish troops into Iraq and specifically blaming the PUK for shooting Turkmen. We note that while this incident did not get significant press play in the US or international press, it was the lead item here for several days. We were in a dialogue with the MFA and various other GOT entities, although they were generally in an information-gathering mode. But those contacts were reflected in the responses given by the PM and the FM to the press. As we look toward GOT efforts to contribute to a stabilization force, we will need to be mindful of the extreme sensitivities of the Turkish body politic to even isolated incidents like this one in northern Iraq and continue to manage them with the Turks as inclusively as possible.

14. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN